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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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~ Beijing's Censorship! ~ People Are Talking! ~ The NVIDIA Shield!
~ EA: No Online Passes! ~ Fighting Cyberattacks! ~ MS Adds Google Chat
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-* Google Atari Breakout Surprise *-
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Another long and tiring week, both physically and mentally. Dealing with irresponsible family members can do that, unfortunately. Trips back and forth to Maine, conference calls with attorneys, and more and more paperwork - it’s all draining!

So, as has been "typical" lately, I just don’t have it in me to write about more "mundane" things that you’re more accustomed - those interestiong little tidbits that can be entertaining, or not. So, let’s just get right to the meat of this week’s issue - enjoy!

Until next time...

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - A New Look at the NVIDIA Shield!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Video Game To Help Kids Fight Cancer!
Atari Breakout Surprise From Google!
And more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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A New Look at the Newly Official NVIDIA Shield

Easily two of the more exciting announcements to come out of CES 2013 this past January were the Tegra 4 mobile processor and graphics platform from NVIDIA, and its "Project Shield" handheld Android gaming controller. Combining some of the most powerful mobile processing graphics available with a traditional gaming controller - and a 5-inch, 720p display for good measure - we finally had the potential for some real console-style gaming

on Android.

The big question, of course, would be the price. Today, that’s been answered. Shield - having dropped its "project" designation - will retail for $349, a bit lower than what many of us here had expected. But "we’re not selling Shield at a loss," NVIDIA told us from its headquarters in Santa Clara.

However the math works out, what you get is a highly capable mobile gaming system that in fact can best consoles in some areas.

We got a new look at NVIDIA Shield, with its refined hardware and expanded gaming roster.

The changes to Shield from the prototypes we’ve used a few times the past few months are subtle, but important. The dual analog sticks have more rubber on top, for better grip, and NVIDIA’s scooped some more plastic from the well in which they sit, the better to position your thumbs in. The D-pad has been redesigned (NVIDIA made clear what we saw in January was more of a placeholder), and the hinge has been made more robust. The triggers on the underside of Shield have had some work done as well.

It’s still a bit of a novelty to see active cooling in a mobile device, but the air intake (in the front) and exhaust (’round back) are as stylish as they are functional, and they’ve been redesigned a bit, too, it seems.

Shield runs Android 4.2.1 at the moment. It’s conceivable it could see Android 4.2.2 by the time it launches in June, but NVIDIA didn’t seem to be too concerned about that, and neither are we. The major functionality - gaming - is all there. Shield runs "stock" Android, but NVIDIA’s TegraZone curated app space is downright beautiful. Some thought was put into that UI. From there, you can play your Shield-optimized games, purchase new ones, and (if you have the proper NVIDIA graphics card on your PC), use Shield to control games being played on a PC gaming rig. The latter feature will launch in beta. We’ve used it twice now, and it’s surprisingly lag-free, though it does have the occasional connection hiccup.

Shield will come preloaded with a couple of games - Sonic 4 Episode II, running at a ridiculous 60 frames per second, and Expendable: Rearmed.

We’ll have lots more from Shield as it gets closer to launch.

EA Getting Rid of Online Passes

Online Passes the controversial attempt by many publishers to encourage new game sales by locking online-centric content for used copies has become engrained in gaming culture over the last several years. But according to a report on VentureBeat, one major company is doing away with them.

Electronic Arts the mega-publisher behind a litany of games including Madden, FIFA, Battlefield, Dead Space, Mass Effect and more will be discontinuing its Online Pass initiative. In a statement provided to VentureBeat, EA s John Reseburg said that none of our new EA titles will include that feature.

Reseburg admitted that Online Passes just don t seem to be working. Initially launched as an effort to package a full menu of online content and services, many players didn t respond to the format. We ve listened to the feedback and decided to do away with it moving forward.

Many major publishers including Sony and Ubisoft continue to use Online Passes, though interestingly, Microsoft never seemed to go down that road. Will EA s abolishment of this system coerce other publishers to follow suit?

Video Game To Help Kids Fight Cancer

Doctors can’t inject cancer patients with intelligent nanobots programmed to launch surgical counterstrikes against the disease. That didn’t stop a team of medical researchers and software programmers from developing a video game several years ago that helped young patients imagine such an empowering scenario. Based on the success of that project, the team recently launched a sequel geared for mobile devices that they hope will further encourage kids undergoing chemotherapy and other treatments to better understand what’s happening inside their bodies and how they might regain their health.

Re-Mission 2 is a collection of six free online games - accessible via Web browser or Apple iPad - that share the theme of taking the fight to cancer. They do this by arming patients with a virtual arsenal of chemo, radiation and targeted cancer drug attacks designed to crush advancing malignant forces. The game - and its 2006 predecessor Re-Mission - are the product of HopeLab, a nonprofit founded in 2001 by Pamela Omidyar, wife of eBay founder Pierre Omidyar.

It’s hard to deny that a diversion such as "Stem Cell Defender," in which players protect white blood cells from a bacteria invasion by unleashing antibiotic bombs, could do wonders for a child’s morale during long waits at a doctor’s office or hospital. (Bacterial infections, nausea and constipation are some treatment-related effects patients may experience.) HopeLab, however, insists the games do more even more than this, claiming they improve treatment outcomes by educating young patients about the disease and how it can be fought. Such knowledge makes these patients more likely to adhere closely to their treatment regimens.

HopeLab has backed this claim over the past few years with a number of studies, although the organization is careful not to directly associate game play with actual cancer remission. In the most recent study, HopeLab worked with Stanford University associate professor of psychology and neuroscience Brian Knutson on a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study analyzing brain regions activated when people play the original Re-Mission. The paper, published in the March 2012 PLoS ONE, compared brain scans in 57 cancer-free undergraduates who were randomly assigned to actively play Re-Mission or passively watch the game. Re-Mission players experienced more activity in neural circuits associated with incentive motivation when compared to those who merely observed game play. Such reward-related activation could shift attitudes and emotions and boost players’ adherence to prescribed chemotherapy and antibiotic treatments to fight infection, the researchers said, although they acknowledge that further tests are needed on actual cancer patients before they can read too much into the results.

An earlier study published in the journal Pediatrics in August 2008 sought to determine whether video games could encourage adolescent and young-adult cancer patients to more consistently take self-administered treatments such as oral chemotherapy, a particularly difficult problem in that age group. The study - which included 374 adolescents and young adults with malignancies including acute leukemia, lymphoma, and soft-tissue sarcoma - found that those who played Re-Mission took their medication more consistently, increased their knowledge of the disease and generally played a more active role in their treatment. Although that study was led by principal investigator and former HopeLab president and CEO Pamela Kato, it also included researchers from West Virginia University and the University of Texas Health Science Center.

Re-Mission 2 caters to kids who have grown up playing Angry Birds, Fruit Ninja and other games on the Internet or via apps on their mobile devices. In fact, the sequel can be played only online or on the iPad. HopeLab is working on versions that will work on Android devices. This is a calculated switch from the format of the original version of Re-Mission, which took players on a quest heavily influenced by popular video games at the time, most notably Tomb Raider. Instead of Lara Croft, Re-Mission featured a microscopic robot named Roxxi, clad in form-fitting silver body armor, who traveled through the bodies of fictional cancer patients, blasting cancer cells and battling the side-effects of cancer and its treatments.

The Re-Mission re-boot is a welcome change, says Brooke Jaffe, a 21-year-old junior at Barnard College in New York City. Quest games like Tomb Raider that are played on PCs and video game consoles like Xbox or the Wii can be intimidating to people who don’t already play them, adds Jaffe, an English major who became aware of HopeLab’s work after she was successfully treated for papillary carcinoma - thyroid cancer - in 2011.

Re-Mission 2 is a much more casual approach to gaming. It may not have the complicated 3-D graphics and the emphasis on anatomical realism of its predecessor, but it’s certainly more accessible to a kid waiting to undergo treatment, or who is fatigued from having just undergone treatment, says Jaffe, one of 120 teens and young adults HopeLab recruited to help develop and evaluate Re-Mission 2. The idea is that patients will get a lot more enjoyment from playing 10 minutes of one of Re-Mission 2’s simpler games than they would from 10 minutes of the original version, which might require 30 minutes of play to get past the first level.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Atari Breakout Surprise From Google

An Atari Breakout surprise is being offered by Google as an Easter egg game. By typing Atari Breakout into a search for images on Google, users

will be presented with the classic arcade game presented by Atari.

The game utilizes images from the performed search, compacted into game bricks. Breakout requires users to move a bar along the bottom of the screen, bouncing a ball against the colored bricks. Each time a brick is hit with the ball, it is eliminated. If the ball is allowed to hit the bottom of the screen, five times, the game ends.

Users can announce their high scores by clicking the share your score button.

As reported by StrategyWiki, Atari Breakout is an arcade game that was initially introduced in May 1976. Google s Easter egg game is in honor of Breakout s 37th birthday.

Nolan Bushnell and Steve Bristow developed the game, using similar concepts found in the game Pong. The earliest prototype was designed by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. For $750, the men were tasked with developing a prototype, utilizing as few chips as possible, within four days.

It took the two men only four days to eliminate 50 chips from the board and develop the prototype. Although the prototype was never used by Atari, it is credited as the initial design.

Breakout, and eventually Super Breakout, inspired the creation of other arcade games, and influenced the creation of the Apple II PC.

Atari Breakout is not the only retro gaming surprise offered by Google. By entering specific binary code at Google s I/O homepage, Simon and Pong can be played. As reported by ABC News, IIOIOOII launches the Simon game and IOOOOOOI launches the Pong game. Entering IIIOOIII will launch a soundboard featuring cats.

SearchEngineLand.com has one of the largest and most comprehensive lists of Easter eggs available on Google.

With the inclusion of Atari Breakout, Google has found yet another creative way to honor classic gaming.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

LulzSec Hackers "At Cutting Edge" of Cyber Crime, Court Told

Four British hackers who took part in 2011 cyber-attacks on targets ranging from the CIA to Sony were audacious, arrogant men whose motivation was "anarchic self-amusement", a court heard on Wednesday.

The men, who have pleaded guilty to a variety of offences, were members of

the hacking collective LulzSec, which caused millions of dollars of damage to corporate and government computer networks during an online crime spree that they boasted about on Twitter.

"They are at the cutting edge of a contemporary, emerging species of international criminal offending known as cyber crime," prosecutor Sandip Patel told a London court at the start of the men's sentencing hearing.

Among other attacks, the men hacked into Pentagon computers, crashed the CIA's website, stole millions of items of private individuals' data such as passwords and user names from companies including Fox and Sony and posted them online on sites such as Pirate Bay.

"LulzSec saw themselves as latter-day pirates," Patel said, who described them as being motivated by "anarchic self-amusement".

Their exploits, as they described them, also included hacking into News International's computer system to post a fake story, purporting to be from the Sun tabloid, announcing that owner Rupert Murdoch had committed suicide.

Ryan Cleary, 21, whose online moniker was ViraL, had constructed an illegal network of computers known as a "botnet" through which he was covertly in control of up to 100,000 computers at a time.

Cleary, who has pleaded guilty to six charges relating to computer misuse, provided the botnet to other hackers so they could attack websites by flooding them with traffic.

Cleary, who has Asperger's syndrome, became obsessed with computers during a childhood and adolescence spent alone in his bedroom without friends, his lawyer John Cooper told the court.

In addition to the hacking offences, Cleary has pleaded guilty to charges of downloading pornographic images of babies and children, including rape scenes.

Cooper said he was "not some career sexual pervert" but rather that the images were also part of his compulsive behaviour, driven by Asperger's.

"He was obsessed with his computer and with what he could find on his computer," the lawyer said.

In the dock alongside Cleary were Ryan Ackroyd, 26; Mustafa Al-Bassam, 18, and Jake Davis, 20. In their hacker days, they were known as Kayla, tFlow and Topiary, respectively.

The court heard that Davis, who has pleaded guilty to two counts, had become a reclusive Internet obsessive during an isolated childhood marked by several tragic deaths in the remote Shetland Islands off the coast of Scotland.

"Without friends, he sought companionship in cyberspace, a world that is artificial and potentially corrosive. He was sucked into a chain of events," said Davis's lawyer, Simon Mayo.

Lawyers for Ackroyd and Bassam, who have pleaded guilty to one and two counts respectively, will address the court about mitigating factors regarding those two defendants on Thursday, after which judge is expected to pass sentence on the four.

Patel said LulzSec was a splinter group that had evolved out of Anonymous, a bigger, shapeless "hacktivist" collective, but that LulzSec lacked the libertarian political agenda of Anonymous.

The name LulzSec is a combination of "lulz", a distortion of the commonly used "LOL" or "laugh out loud", and security.

The alleged ringleader of LulzSec was U.S.-based Hector Xavier Monsegur, known as "Sabu", who was arrested in June 2011 but agreed to cooperate, maintaining his online persona for a time and leading the FBI to other members of the group.

As China’s Social Media Takes Off, Beijing’s Censorship Campaign Heats Up

A few well-regarded intellectuals known to be critical of the Communist Party have drawn millions of followers on China’s Twitter.

Chinese government censors are silencing influential opponents by shutting down their social media accounts on the pretext of a campaign against online rumors, victims of the practice say.

The authorities believe that liberal ideology will undermine their rule, says Murong Xuecun, a famous author and outspoken critic of censorship whose accounts on four Twitter-like platforms disappeared suddenly last Sunday evening. The space on China s Internet for public opinion is being narrowed.

Social media sites such as Sina Weibo, which has 300 million users, have become forums for unprecedented freewheeling discussion and news-sharing. Despite being subject to careful censorship, they have expanded the range for self-expression beyond recognition throughout the past five years.

Particularly striking has been the role of a few well-regarded intellectuals who have drawn millions of followers with often-barbed comments on current affairs that are seldom sympathetic to the Communist Party or the government.

They appear to be among the first to be affected by a campaign by the State Internet Information Office, launched two weeks ago, targeting those who create and spread rumors online, said the state-run news agency Xinhua.

Though Xinhua made reference to bloggers spreading rumors about bird flu, other observers see a darker purpose behind the campaign.

The government fears that more and more opinion leaders are gaining recognition by ordinary people and they represent an alternative authority to the government, argues Zhang Xuezhong, a lawyer whose own Sina Weibo account was mysteriously closed on Monday.

Such opinion leaders are a focus of the official crackdown on rumors.

Some verified accounts with a large number of followers also help lend credence to this wrong information through re-posts, the Xinhua report said. These posts severely damage the authority of Internet media and destroy normal communication, the agency added.

Mr. Murong, who says he had 8.5 million followers on his four accounts, suspects they were shut down because he had used them to post a message from a friend, law professor He Bing, whose own account had been closed earlier after he relayed a post about a young man stabbing a government Internet regulator.

Professor He had nearly half a million followers, making his a big V account a term used to describe heavily followed accounts opened by individuals whose identity has been verified by the platform s managers. That gives their content added credibility.

Such accounts are at the heart of Sina Weibo s business model, attracting millions of readers. Closing them would be bound to have an impact on the site s revenue, says David Bandurski, head of the China Media Project at Hong Kong University. Sina Weibo is like a party; if it s no fun people won t go.

Such commercial considerations, though, are trumped by the Chinese government s determination to regain a measure of control over online debate and comment, Mr. Bandurski argues. Setting the agenda through media control is a priority to maintain [Communist] party rule, he says.

Popular commentators such as Lee Kai-Fu, a former head of Google in China who has more than 40 million followers, can carry sensitive topics to places the government does not want them to go in a matter of minutes through multiple re-posts, Bandurski points out.

Murong, whose writing and blog posts have made him a widely followed critic of censorship, sees the government s campaign against rumors as another blow in the online battle for public opinion which he believes the Communist Party is losing. They really want to win back lost ground, he says.

Murong recounted how he received a telephone call from a Sina Weibo employee two minutes after his account on the site vanished at 10:00 p.m. last Sunday evening. He said they had got orders from above to shut me down, Murong recalled, but he didn t tell me why.

He is not hopeful about his chances of opening a new account, even anonymously, and worries about the implications for freedom of expression in China of the government crackdown.

 There are only about 400 or 500 liberal intellectuals who are really active on Weibo, he estimates. If the authorities suspended their accounts it would be very hard for them to make a comeback.

On the other hand, he points out, whenever they close a Weibo account a lot of people raise their voices against that. It just causes more online protest. Some of his followers have changed their account names to Murong Xuecun second generation in solidarity since he was silenced.

Professor Zhang said he did not bother to ask Sina Weibo why his account had been closed. The government does not like my opinions about democracy and civil rights, he said, and that was sufficient. But he thought a recent post might also have precipitated his fate.

Last week Zhang revealed on his Sina Weibo blog the content of a government order sent to his university, the East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai, advising teachers to avoid speaking to

students about universal values, press freedom, civil society, civil rights, the Communist Party s past mistakes, the privileged class, and judicial independence.

The existence of the seven don t talks memo, as it has become known on the web, has since been confirmed by other professors at other universities.

 The government does not care too much about rumors, scoffs Zhang, discounting the authorities stated goal in closing his and other social media accounts. They fear the truth.

Alabama-based Firm To Combat Cyberattacks

A new company is being launched in Birmingham to combat computer-based attacks.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is starting an intelligence company called Malcovery in a public-private partnership.

The director of UAB’s computer forensics office, Gary Warner, will serve as the company’s chief technologist while remaining in his role with the university.

Warner says the company provides real-time intelligence to identify cyberattacks as they occur worldwide. Malcovery is an outgrowth of Warner’s work identify computer security threats.

Malcovery is based jointly in Birmingham and in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Oregon Bill Guards Workers’ Social Media Passwords

The Oregon Legislature has passed a bill barring bosses from demanding employees or job applicants turn over their Facebook passwords and other social media login information.

In a 56 -3 vote on Thursday, the Oregon House sent the bill to the governor’s desk.

The bill prohibits employers from requiring workers to "friend" or connect with them on social media. It also bans bosses from forcing employees to access their social media accounts in front of them.

As part of a workplace investigation, though, an employer could ask employees to share content from their social media accounts.

The bill has broad support from privacy advocates, employers and unions.

A similar bill safeguarding students’ social media login information is currently making its way through the House.

Microsoft Adds Google Chat Support to Outlook.com

in Hopes of Winning Over Gmail Users

Microsoft is continuing its mission of getting Google users to switch to its products. And this time, it’s not doing it with an aggressive advertisement or marketing campaign.

Microsoft announced today that it is adding Google Chat support to its Outlook.com email service. Users will be able to log in with their Google account, see their Google contact list on the right side of the e-mail window and start chatting with those contacts right from Outlook.com.

Microsoft introduced Outlook.com last July as a replacement for Hotmail.com. The email service has a number of unique features, including Sweep, which sweeps newsletters, daily deal or social media alert emails into their own folder.

While there has been built-in Skype and Facebook chat in Outlook.com, Microsoft said that Google Chat support was one of the most requested features from users.

"One more thing people have been asking for before making the switch from Gmail to Outlook was the ability to chat with their Google contacts in Outlook.com," Dharmesh Mehta, senior director of Outlook.com, told ABC News. "We think this is one last thing people needed to make that switch." Google’s Gmail, which has more than 425 million active users, was one of the first webmail services to integrate instant messaging right into the webmail service.

Since launching Outlook.com Microsoft has launched a series of aggressive marketing campaigns aiming to get Gmail users to switch to Outlook. In one advertisement, Microsoft showed how Google scans e-mails for key words and then surfaces paid ads based on them. Outlook only surfaces ads in the main inbox; not against messages and the content in them.

"We don’t use the content of your email or your attachments, or anything else that’s attached to your email. We don’t use any of that information for targeting ads that we sell," Mehta said.

The Google Chat feature will begin rolling out to Outlook.com users starting today. All users should have it in the next few days.

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